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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH PROVINCE: DE-BA,ATHIFICATION ISSUE  
GAINS MOMENTUM

REF: BAGHDAD 32

Classified By: Diwaniyah PRT Team Leader Michael Klecheski. Reasons: 1  
.4 (b/d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: An anti-Ba,athist demonstration, coupled with the Provincial Council,s announcement that former officials of the Saddam regime must give up their weapons within seven days, mark an escalation of the Ba,athist issue in predominantly Shi,a Diwaniyah Province. Diwaniyah,s Governor Salim Alwan (Da'wa) and other politicians argue that cracking down on Ba,athists is essential to forestall security problems in the near future. Although acknowledging that the local population remembers the previous regime with bitterness, Provincial Council (PC) members allied with former Prime Minister Allawi worried to the PRT that the anti-Ba,athist measures are aimed at hurting their bloc,s prospects in the province. They note that the moves may backfire and help Allawi. A local employee of the PRT reports that many of his contacts in Diwaniyah discount the Ba,athist threat in the province and view the anti-Ba,athist campaign with skepticism. END SUMMARY

ANTI-BA,ATHIST RHETORIC

12. (SBU) According to press reports and the PRT's contacts in the Diwaniyah PC, demonstrators marched on the provincial government building on January 21 to protest against MPs Salah Mutlaq, Ayad Allawi, and Dhafir al-Ani participating in the upcoming elections. Reports from PRT contacts in the PC place the demonstration,s size between 300 and 1000 participants. The Political Prisoners, Foundation, an organization that unites victims of the Saddam regime, led the demonstration. Governor Alwan granted permission for the march. This follows a reportedly smaller demonstration on January 16 for which the Governor had not given permission.

13. (U) Governor Alwan, who had visited the Political Prisoners' Foundation a few days earlier, met with the January 21 demonstrators to express his support. He also spoke out on the political aspects of the de-Ba,athification issue on January 18, saying that followers of Saddam were seeking to disrupt the political process. In a visit to the province,s Human Rights Office, the Governor reportedly underscored the many mass graves in Diwaniyah and stressed the need to be fair to the families of the victims. (Note: Some people in Diwaniyah still have strong memories of the abuses of the Saddam era. One contact recently described how Saddam,s security forces used what is now Camp Echo to shoot political opponents. Their families were forced both to watch and to pay for the bullets. End Note.)  
EFFORTS TO DISARM THE BA,ATHISTS

14. (U) Also on January 21, the PC,s Security Committee Chair, Kareem Zugair (Sadrist), announced that all former officials of the Saddam regime and Fedayeen Saddam members must turn in any weapons and related equipment at their local police stations within seven days. He threatened severe measures if they refused to do so, without offering further details on those measures. According to one media account,

the PC also suggested that they would evict Ba'athist-affiliated organizations from offices in government buildings in the province.

¶5. (C) Asked about Zugair's announcement, Governor Alwan told us that it was to implement a law banning Ba'athist possession of government-issued and permitted weapons. He added that he had seen unconfirmed reports that a small Ba'athist cell in the province was meeting, possibly to plan disruptive actions. He avoided elaborating on how authorities would implement the process of taking weapons from the Ba'athists who did not comply with the announcement.

#### CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES

¶6. (C) Dakhil Saihoud (Da'wa), chair of the PC Committee on Accountability and Justice and Supportive Powers, explained to PRTOffs that the move to secure the former Ba'athists' weapons was not politically motivated or in any way meant to be vengeful. Instead, Dakhil argued, it was aimed to ensure security ahead of the upcoming Arbreen pilgrimage, parts of which would pass through the province, and ahead of the election. While most former Ba'athists in the province did not have any malicious intent, a few harbored hidden goals of causing problems on both occasions. The weapons they held were government property, Dakhil continued, and should be returned.

¶7. (C) Referring to USG efforts to resolve the conflict over de-Ba'athification, Dakhil had publicly condemned foreign interference in the pre-election process and echoed that theme to PRTOffs in private. He stressed that he was one of the strongest supporters of the United States in the PC but that he adamantly disagreed with the USG on de-Ba'athification and saw it as inappropriate interference. He insisted that de-Ba'athification would not harm the

upcoming elections. Sunnis are sure to vote and tribal chiefs throughout the country would still encourage a good turnout. He did not link the U.S. Vice President's recent visit with his opinion.

¶8. (C) PC Media Committee Chair Huda Hmoud (Iraqi National List) offered PRTOffs an additional perspective. She dismissed the demonstrations in Diwaniyah as staged events and said political forces allied with Iran had paid the demonstrators to attend. From Hmoud's perspective, the anti-Ba'athist campaign in Diwaniyah aims to squelch support for secular views and for pro-Allawi forces in the election. Allawi's INL had fared reasonably well in Diwaniyah in the 2009 provincial elections, garnering three seats in the (28-member) PC, Hmoud continued, and had gained more support by helping lead the recent opposition to the incumbent governor. Hmoud added that given the depth of contempt for the Saddam regime in the province, politicians like she had a hard time publicly opposing the anti-Ba'athist campaign.

¶9. (C) PC Agriculture Chair Baqr Shaalan (INL) took a similar tack, charging that the anti-Ba'athist campaign in Diwaniyah had been contrived by those seeking to hamper pro-Allawi forces. He saw the demands to secure former Ba'athists' weapons as the first of several ploys that Da'wa and the Iraqi National Alliance would use in Diwaniyah ahead of the election to keep Iraqiya on the defensive. The effort was likely to fail, Shaalan said, particularly because INL candidates in the province are not affiliated with Ba'athists. By way of example, he pointed to his own brother, COR member Hussein Shaalan, who is running for re-election on the Iraqiya ticket. Shaalan is widely known to have suffered under Saddam, our interlocutor noted, so that efforts to link him to Ba'athists will fail.

#### SOME LOCAL VIEWS

¶10. (SBU) According to two of the PRT's local employees, who spoke with a range of close to a dozen urban contacts, the majority of locals in Diwaniyah believe that the province has few if any active Ba'athist sympathizers. Those who remain pose little threat to security. Some locals, they reported, despise the political repression under Saddam but believe they were better off economically and in terms of essential services in that period. Thus, many see the anti-Ba'athist campaign as overblown. Some locals will dismiss the campaign

as part of a political process in which they have little interest. Some may be alienated by it.

¶11. (C) The self-identified independent mayor of Saniyah, a small town near Diwaniyah, similarly criticized the anti-Ba'athist campaign. He argued that the &bad Ba,athists8 (those who had actively collaborated with the Saddam regime) had mostly fled the province. The &good Ba,athists8 (those who joined the party only for career purposes) continue to live in the province but have no ill intent. The mayor told PRTOffs both INA and Da,wa contain many such "good Ba'athists," so that implementing the anti-Ba,athist campaign in the province is risky. The PRT's interlocutor believed the campaign could end up making Ba,athists look &heroic8 in a province like Diwaniyah where the public might see them as the subject of politically motivated harassment.

COMMENT

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¶12. (C) The PRT's conversations with key politicians and sampling of the views of locals suggest that though there is no sympathy for those affiliated with the Saddam regime, de-Ba'athification has not been a burning issue. Stoking the fire of that issue, then, could fuel voter cynicism or benefit the Iraqiya coalition.

Qbenefit the Iraqiya coalition.

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